



## The Ecotourism Society



The World Tourism Organization has estimated that over 595 million people traveled internationally in 1997. Although tourism overall has been growing at an annual rate of 4%, nature travel, also known as ecotourism, is increasing at an estimated annual rate of 10–30%. The Ecotourism Society (TES) of North Bennington, Vermont, was founded in 1990 as a tool for both consumers and ecotourism professionals to help make travel an environmentally responsible activity and to contribute to the conservation of natural resources and the well-being of local people. The organization also fosters a sense of synergy between ecotourism entrepreneurs, researchers, and conservationists. TES is an international nonprofit organization with over 1,700 members in more than 70 countries.

The TES Web site at <http://www.ecotourism.org/> provides visitors with vital facts on ecotourism and tourism in general as well as “nuggets of personal wisdom” acquired by explorers in the field. Visitors can begin by clicking on the Your Travel Choice Makes A Difference link on the home page. This leads to further links that show visitors how to consider travel from a more holistic perspective, teach them about tourism’s impact and how tourists can build sustainable economies, and lead them in exploring the world of ecotourism so they can learn how to choose responsible destinations, tours, and accommodations. In addition, the site provides information on how visitors can experience ecotourism with member tour operators and lodges around the globe.

The In Search of True Ecotourism link leads to reports filed by Megan Epler Wood, TES president, who is currently on sabbatical from TES. With titles such as “Healing the Scarred Mayan Forests” and “In the Shadow of Machu Picchu,” the reports recount Wood’s journey through Central and South America in 1998–1999 and investigate “the lives of the entrepreneurs, idealists, indigenous people, and activists who are bringing true ecotourism to life and bringing the reader to their doorstep.”

Because tourism development is often uncontrolled, especially within the relatively new realm of ecotourism, there are many environmental and political questions that are still being answered. Each year, TES identifies key issues in the field of ecotourism and works with other organizations around the world to bring these issues into public awareness. By following the TES Initiatives link on the home page, visitors can explore issues tackled by the organization over the past decade. Past issues have included creating policies for the economic development of the ecotourism industry, helping ecotourism businesses meet standards for sustainability, and recognizing the effects of ecotourism on local communities.

The site offers visitors lots of practical information. The Eco-Professionals link, for example, leads to resources to help professionals in diverse fields use ecotourism to support conservation. Two links on this page provide information on how to conduct ecotourism research and how to use ecotourism as a conservation tool in the area of biological assessments, and a third link provides a forum for entrepreneurs working in the ecotourism business. Links in the forum provide access to useful business reports from TES members as well as a set of guidelines for nature tour operators. —Ron Chepesiuk

## A Cleaner River to Run through China

China has begun construction on a large-scale project to reduce the 700 million tons of untreated wastewater annually flowing into the world’s third longest river, the Yangtze, and one of its main tributaries, the Jialing. The pollution has contaminated the river valley in Sichuan Province and threatens the environment of the Three Gorges region, a popular tourist area.

The project, which has a scheduled completion date of 2004, consists of a 92-kilometer-long network of underground pipelines that will collect household wastewater and transport it to two processing plants. The World Bank and the Chinese State Development Bank will provide most of the \$310 million cost of the initiative, which is being implemented by Chinese state agencies and the Chongqing municipal government.

## Going Public with Chemical Information

To promote public understanding of the health and environmental risks associated with high production volume chemicals, basic health and environmental information on over 2,000 such chemicals is being released through the EPA’s HPV Chemical Challenge Program.

The program, part of Vice President Al Gore’s Chemical Right-to-Know Initiative, makes available to the public screening-level toxicity data on chemicals produced or imported into the United States in amounts exceeding one million pounds per year. The information has been voluntarily provided by 403 chemical manufacturers. The database established through this program will support a screening-level hazard characterization.

## Evolving Dangers of *E. coli*

According to a report in the September–October 1999 issue of *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, an estimated half dozen new strains of toxin-secreting *E. coli* may account for over 55,000 cases of illness per year in the United States. The report states that “the importance of some of these organisms in the United States is seriously underestimated,” possibly because the bacteria cannot readily be identified in U.S. laboratories.

Most of the public health focus on *E. coli* has been on the O157:H7 strain, but outbreaks of the O111 strain, one of which killed a seven-year-old Ohio girl in October 1998, have been turning up in the United States. In a 20 December 1999 Cox News Service article, David Acheson, director of the Food Safety Initiative in Boston, said that U.S. regulatory agencies have not been proactive enough in researching these new bacteria, especially since their adverse health effects have been reported in Canada and other countries. Paul Mead, head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s infectious disease unit and lead author of the *Emerging Infectious Diseases* report, says that his agency is now developing a clearer sense of the dangers of *E. coli* strains other than O157:H7.